



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **News Release**

### **Department of Health Makes Flu Vaccine Recommendations**

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Due to the nationwide shortage of flu vaccine, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) in collaboration with Utah's 12 local health departments today recommended that all available public and private vaccine in Utah be used to vaccinate persons at the highest risk of influenza complications for the next four weeks. During that time the UDOH will assess the success of reaching those populations as well as the amount of remaining vaccine and consider expanding recommendations to include lower risk groups.

The UDOH completely endorses the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) statement that all health care providers and others who provide flu vaccine restrict its use to persons in the following priority groups:

- children 6 months to 23 months of age
- adults 65 years of age and older
- persons 2 years to 64 years with chronic medical conditions\*
- all women who will be pregnant during influenza season
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- children 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin therapy
- health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children <6 months of age.

“For at least the next four weeks we strongly request that all public and private organizations, including those with scheduled community flu shot clinics, refocus their efforts on reaching these high risk groups,” says Dr. Scott Williams, Executive Director, UDOH. “We ask others to wait until those most at risk of life-threatening complications from influenza have the chance to receive the vaccine.”

Persons in the priority groups, and those caring for them, should search locally for vaccine if their regular health care provider does not have vaccine available. Information about providers and clinics that have vaccine for priority groups can be obtained by

calling your health care provider, local health department or the UDOH's Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.

Persons who are not in the priority groups should wait to get a flu shot until the situation can be reassessed in about a month and updated recommendations are issued. UDOH encourages physicians and others who provide flu vaccine to educate their clients about the vaccine supply situation and ask healthy individuals to defer vaccination.

“We are relying on the cooperation of the public and flu vaccine providers to help us assure that vaccine is first available for those at highest risk of complications and the health care workers who care for them,” said Dr. Scott Williams, Executive Director, UDOH. “The UDOH with support of local health departments will continue to monitor vaccine supplies and reevaluate these recommendations as the season progresses.”

Before making the recommendation, UDOH completed an assessment of the influenza vaccine inventory in the state. The Department found that although the shortage may be slightly less severe in Utah than in other states, significant shortages are present in some areas and for some flu vaccine providers.

The vaccine shortage occurred because the British regulatory agency suspended the Chiron Corporation's license to produce vaccine. None of the Chiron vaccine had been distributed to people or health care providers in Utah. The vaccine available from health care providers in Utah is from different manufacturers.

Approximately 36,000 people in the U.S. die from the flu each year – the vast majority of these are individuals from high-risk groups. UDOH estimates that there are 525,000 people in Utah in the high-risk groups and all available doses may be needed for those in the priority groups. Influenza vaccine provides the greatest benefit to those who are at high risk of serious complications if they get influenza.

The inactivated or killed vaccine (shot) is recommended for individuals at high risk of complications from influenza. Healthy individuals aged 5-49 years who are not pregnant are encouraged to get the live attenuated vaccine (nasal spray). This includes health care workers and contacts of children less than 6 months of age. The live attenuated vaccine

should not be used for health care workers who care for severely immunocompromised patients.

UDOH recommends the following simple steps to help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and keep your distance from others when you are sick.
- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Use alternative greetings to handshaking during the flu season.

UDOH also recommends that individuals 65 years of age and older or those who have certain medical conditions receive the pneumonia vaccine. Pneumonia is a life threatening complication resulting from influenza. Pneumonia vaccine, which is readily available, can be given year round and is usually given just once in a lifetime.

For more information about influenza and pneumonia vaccinations, contact your health care provider, local health department, or the Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659. Physicians wanting additional information on vaccine resources may contact the Utah Immunization Program at 801-538-9450.

\* Persons with chronic medical conditions include those with

- pulmonary illnesses such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or asthma;
- cardiovascular illnesses, such as congestive heart failure;
- chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes mellitus);
- kidney dysfunction;
- hemoglobinopathies such as sickle cell anemia;
- immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus [HIV]).

**Editor's note:** the UDOH will begin posting reported influenza cases beginning Wednesday, October 13 at [www.health.utah.gov/flu](http://www.health.utah.gov/flu). The website will be updated once a week by each Wednesday at 1:00 p.m.

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*